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TAGS: IS LE MOPS PREL PTER SY

SUBJECT: LAF DEPLOYMENT PLAYING INTO HIZBALLAH'S PLAN

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: On August 17, Ambassador and emboff met with Minister of Public Works and Transportation Mohammed Safadi. Safadi (a Sunni from Tripoli and a member of the March 14 coalition) argued that the deployment of LAF is not in the interest of GOL and plays into the hands of Hizballah.

By sending 15,000 troops to the south the "protection," although perhaps only imagined, of the demarcation line between Hizballah and non-Hizballah Lebanon is gone. The GOL will be under political and some military attack from Hizballah as it tries to expose the weakness of both LAF and GOL. The Israelis will now have an address -- a GOL address -- to attack, when Hizballah launches a strike against Israeli positions. However, he assures that the March 14th alliance will not let Hizballah take over Lebanon. END

SUMMARY

¶2. (C/NF) Safadi described the August 16 cabinet meeting as a reflection on existing Lebanese shortcomings, particularly the GOL's inability to properly communicate before the war. He criticized his own March 14th alliance's lack of consultancy and coordination, adding that even after the war they were not prepared for yesterday's cabinet meeting. Safadi said that he entered this most important cabinet meeting with no idea what his own March 14 coalition's position was regarding LAF deployment. He asked, if this group cannot communicate properly, then how can the entire government be expected to do so. He indicated that GOL's lack of real communication -- a product both of the desire to avoid perhaps debilitating conflict as well as of traditionally dysfunctional systems -- was one of the contributing factors to the conflict.

GOL Will Take  
the Blame

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¶3. (C/NF) Now GOL finds itself in a predicament. In the eyes of Israel and the international community GOL is now responsible for everything that happens on Lebanese soil, including the actions of Hizballah. The deployment of LAF to the south means that any conflict will be between GOI and GOL and not GOI and Hizballah. Simultaneously Hizballah will continue to be a threat because of its arms. An "understanding" was reached that any exposed weapons can be confiscated by LAF. While a Hizballah concession meant that there are no longer "no-go" areas in the south, in practice the LAF will need a search warrant to search warehouses, homes, etc. for concealed weapons. The warrant can take a day, week, or month to be issued. Safadi wants the LAF to have the right to make searches without warrants. This will be an issue raised at Parliament, he vowed.

LAF in South Suits  
Hizballah

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¶4. (C/NF) Safadi argued that the deployment of the LAF to the south is not in the interest of GOL and plays into the hands of Hizballah. The deployment to the south exposes LAF and the rest of Lebanon. He argues that prior to their deployment to the south, the LAF was informally seen as protecting the demarcation line between east and west Beirut, and the Hizballah and non-Hizballah trends of Lebanon more generally. The LAF was considered by non-Shia as the last line between them and possible Hizballah attack domestically. By sending 15,000 troops to the south this "protection," although perhaps only imagined by Lebanon's non-Hizballah population, is gone. With the LAF strength shifted southward, the Sunnis, Christians, and Druze feel much more exposed to Hizballah, at the same time as Hizballah and its allies seem determined to launch some kind of coup d'etat.

Hizballah's New War

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¶5. (C/NF) Safadi assures that both Hizballah and Israel will uphold the cessation of hostilities in UNSCR 1701 -- for the time being. However, the challenge now will be for GOL to withstand the political attacks of Hizballah, with QINOR military attacks playing a supporting role. He believes that the GOL will be under constant political attack from Hizballah as it tries to weaken and ultimately dismantle the current government to ensure a new pro-Hizballah government. Eventually, Hizballah will try to embarrass the GOL by performing small military operations in the south that expose the weakness of both LAF and GOL. Israel will then attack

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GOL installations, further weakening the state.

¶6. (C/NF) Hizballah's new war, he warns, will be to "get rid of the government." However, in a stern voice he assured that the Sunni, Christians, and Druze will not "stand by and watch Hizballah take over the country." A letter is currently being drafted to Parliament requesting that LAF be granted the power it needs to fully defend itself and the land. Other than noting a reliance on the parliamentary majority Safadi did not provide substantial ideas on how GOL and the March 14th alliance will fight this new war.

¶7. (C/NF) Referring to Syrian President Assad's August 15 speech, Safadi said that it went too far even for Lebanon's pro-Syrians. In a separate meeting, Minister of Economy and Trade Sami Haddad commented that Amin Shiri, Hizballah Parliament member, was critical of the speech. Surprisingly, Assad's speech, which made sharp remarks toward GOL, was not discussed during the cabinet meeting.

¶8. (C/NF) Safadi concluded that the March 14th alliance must work hard to extract itself from the "soup" it is in. The group will aim to meet twice a week, but no less than once a week, in spite of security concerns.

COMMENT

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¶9. (C/NF) Safadi has ambitions to be prime minister. So while he adheres to the March 14 movement he joined after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, he recognizes that the Hariris will never fully trust an independent, and independently wealthy, Sunni who could provide competition to Saad Hariri moving into the premiership he sees as his birthright. But Safadi's criticisms of the poor communication within the March 14 bloc and the GOL more generally do not stem from sour grapes alone: Saad Hariri's frequent and lengthy absences from Beirut, Fouad Siniora's tendency to micromanage and keep information close-hold, and the petty jealousies and

grievances dividing other March 14 politicians make initiative and focus difficult to achieve. Hizballah, on the other hand, is focused, disciplined, and extremely well funded.

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